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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004245

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/14/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PRT ERBIL: KRG PESHMERGA MINISTER'S TAKE ON TURKEY
AND THE PKK

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3980
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 4059

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) This is a PRT Erbil cable. Omer Othman (known as
Za'im Ali), the Kurdistan Regional Government's
Minister of Peshmerga (KDP - Kurdistan Democratic Party) met
Erbil IPAO to clarify
Peshmerga and party views on Kurdish-U.S. relations, the PKK,
negotiations with
Baghdad, and freedom of the press. This cable addresses
Za'im Ali's perspective on
Turkey and PKK's presence in the KRG.

Who do you love?

[1](#)2. (C) Za'im Ali accused the U.S. of caring more about
Turkey than the Kurds. He
said that while he recognizes the U.S. wants a strong
relationship with Turkey
because of their common NATO connection, the Americans should
remember
sacrifices the Kurds have made for the United States in the
common struggle against
Saddam Hussein. Drawing an implicit parallel between Iraq's
previous regime and
Turkish policies vis-a-vis their Kurdish populations, Za'im
Ali repeatedly called on
the U.S. to withhold support from Turkey when it takes
actions against its own
people.

PKK - the fly in the ointment

[1](#)3. (C) The significant economic exchange between Turkey and
the KRG is essential
for Kurdish development, Za'im Ali noted, but Turkey detains
shipments at the border
because of political issues - primarily PKK's presence in
the KRG. He described the
PKK as a national liberation force that should not be treated
simply as a terrorist
organization. Referring to PKK's long-term goals, Za'im Ali
distinguished between
the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), whom he said seek political
control in Iraq, and the
PKK who do not want to control Turkey but only seek to gain
their legitimate
'national' rights.

¶4. (C) Za'im Ali said KDP relations with the PKK are bad due to fighting in the 1990s over territorial control and incitement of Turkey, when up to 6,000 KDP Peshmerga were killed. However, he stressed that Kurds in Iraq must still recognize the national aspirations of Turkish Kurds. (COMMENT: The younger generation in Erbil, who have been raised on Massoud Barzani's nationalist rhetoric and have not suffered the internecine conflict of the 1990s, support PKK goals strongly. U.S. demands that KRG President Barzani designate the PKK a terrorist organization could destabilize his position in the KRG, a risk he is unlikely to take. END COMMENT)

An envoy of our own

¶5. (C) Referring to the KRG visit of General Ralston, Za'im Ali said America's appointment of an envoy to mediate between Turkey and the Kurds was a 'holy role'. He stated that the KRG would cooperate with him, while still holding to their view that a political solution is necessary and Turkey needs to improve the situation at home so that the PKK will have no support and will be able to go home. He recognized that Turkey has legitimate reasons for anger against the PKK, and stated

BAGHDAD 00004245 002 OF 002

that there are PKK 'bases' inside the KRG. Za'im Ali expressed concern that if the Peshmerga or foreign troops take out the PKK now, 'a thousand times as many will come up.' He said KRG President Massoud Barzani expects a return visit from General Ralston in two weeks. (COMMENT: Ralston told PolOff in Baghdad that he has no plans to visit Kurdistan in that timeframe. END COMMENT.)
Speckhard